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Ghana Assembly of IMC Approves Plans for Future

(Accra) - Far-reaching decisions concerning the world mission of the Church were made by 200 delegates to the quadrennial Assembly of the International Missionary Council which concluded its sessions at Accra, Ghana, on January 8.

Resolutions approving in principle the integration of the IMC with the World Council of Churches (see EPS No. 1) were adopted by 58 votes to 7 after five sessions in which the plan was debated.

In the final vote the Christian councils of Norway, Sweden, the Congo, and Belgium voted as units against the plan. There are 38 member units of the IMC (national Christian councils and missionary agencies) with voting representation ranging from one to eleven. Individual opposition came from some delegates from Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

The World Council of Churches was requested to defer its Assembly planned for Ceylon in 1960 for one year. Earlier in the session Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, Geneva, Switzerland, WCC general secretary, and Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, New York, chairman of the WCC's Central Committee and president of the United Lutheran Church, had indicated their willingness to propose delaying the Assembly until 1961.

Purpose of postponing the WCC Assembly is to give the member councils of the IMC more time to study details of the plan of integration. The draft plan endorsed by the Central Committee of the World Council in the summer of 1957 calls for creation of a Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and a Division on World Mission and Evangelism similar to other divisions of the WCC.

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Under the proposal outlined in the draft plan the head of the Division on World Mission and Evangelism, which would carry on the responsibilities undertaken by the IMC, would be an associate general secretary of the WCC.

The two organisations have worked "in association" with each other for a decade and have jointly sponsored a Division of Studies, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, an East Asia Secretariat and emergency inter-church aid in Asia and Africa. The WCC was formed in 1948, but the IMC has existed since 1921. Its origins are in the famous Edinburgh Conference on the World Mission of the Church held in 1910.

The plan for integration is in response to demands that the mission of the Church and the unity of the Church should not be separated. Proponents have argued that the World Council of Churches cannot accomplish its goals for church unity without a closer identification with mission and evangelism.

Opposition to the plan has come from several sources. It was feared that certain evangelical groups now cooperating with the IMC but not members of the WCC would be lost. Large missionary agencies which are conducted independently from the organisation of the Church fear loss of missionary initiative if merger takes place. Dangers of bureaucracy and unwieldy size were also mentioned.

Orthodox churches in the World Council of Churches expressed fears when the plan was presented at the WCC Central Committee in New Haven that they would be involved in proselytizing activities of which they do not approve. Metropolitan James of Melita told the Ghana Assembly that Orthodox churches will support the plan if the constitution of the WCC is not changed. He said they "desire the mission of the Church to be closely linked to the Church but not taken into the WCC."

A draft timetable for the integration of the two world bodies calls for the IMC to send the plan as soon as possible to its member councils in time for comments to come back by the end of April, 1959. A final plan will be sent out in early 1960 by the existing Joint Committee of the IMC and the WCC in the form of a draft constitution for the new unified body.

The constitution will be considered by the IMC's administrative committee, or by a specially called assembly in early 1961. After six months the plan, as approved by member councils of the IMC, would be sent to the WCC for action at a deferred WCC Third Assembly at the end of 1961, probably in Ceylon.

Bishop Newbigin Elected Chairman

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin of the Church of South India was elected chairman of the IMC, succeeding Dr. Mackay, who was named honorary chairman of the organisation. Professor Walter Freytag of the University of Hamburg and the Rev. Christian G. Baeta of Ghana were named vice-chairmen of the IMC's administrative committee. At the same time, Dr. James K. Mathews, associate general secretary of the Division of World Missions of the Methodist Church in the USA, was elected general secretary of IMC, succeeding Dr. Charles W. Ranson. Dr. Ranson was named director of a \$4,000,000 theological education fund granted to IMC by the Sealantic Fund and will take office on July 1, 1958 (see EPS No. 1).

WCC Religious Liberty Study Welcomed

In other action, the delegates welcomed a study of religious liberty approved by the Central Committee of the WCC last summer, and authorised IMC officers to participate. At the same time, the Assembly went on record defending the cause of Arab refugees in the Near East and urged the member councils of IMC to take up the matter with their governments.

The Assembly voted in favour of a resolution from Latin America councils suggesting a possible regional secretariat for all of Latin America and asking for the appointment of a liaison officer to serve in the meantime. The Assembly also commended Latin American plans for a general conference on Latin America similar to the East Asia Conference held in Frapat, Sumatra, last March, and the All-Africa Conference, meeting this month in Ibadan, Nigeria. Suggested time for the conference was 1959 or 1960.

In a protest against the refusal of the East German government to grant a visa to Missionary Director Gerhardt Brennecke from East Berlin to attend the Accra Assembly, the delegates unanimously accepted a resolution saying, "The way in which the government of the German Democratic Republic acts is contradictory to the freedom of the Church." It is impossible to recognise the Church without affirming at the same time its responsibility to fulfil its missionary task beyond all frontiers. The resolution concluded: "We are greeting our Christian brothers in the DDR, remembering them with the Apostle Paul's words--'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord'." Leading delegates at Accra emphasized that the resolution marked the first time a large international conference has addressed a message to Christians in Eastern Germany and expressed its attitude on the church policy of the DDR government.

Subsequently the East German government provided a visa for Dr. Brennecke. He will arrive too late for the Assembly but will deliver a series of lectures at the University in Accra.

E.P.S., Geneva

Churches Celebrate Jubilee, Propose Peace Congress

(Prague) - The Ecumenical Council of Churches in Czechoslovakia held its plenary meeting in Prague in December to coincide with the ending of the year of celebrations marking the 500th anniversary of the founding of the Czech Brethren (Moravians).

The meeting was immediately followed by a national ecumenical conference of church workers which defined the position of the churches on the use of thermo-nuclear weapons and proposed a world Christian peace congress. The initiative for the national conference was taken by the teaching staffs of theological faculties, who prepared the meeting.

The Ecumenical Council noted that "although endeavours were made in the jubilee year of the Czech Brethren to unite some of the churches, this was not accomplished", but went on to add that the jubilee year nevertheless "meant a further strengthening of ecumenical tendencies and ideas in the country."

The Council agreed to strengthen contacts with churches abroad and studied the resolutions of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches held at New Haven, Connecticut, in August 1957.

Dr. Victor Hajek of the Czech Brethren was elected as incoming chairman and Bohuslav Pospisil, director of the ecumenical institute of the Comenius Theological Faculty, was re-elected secretary.

Ecumenical Conference

Speakers at the ecumenical conference, which was attended by 200 delegates, included Dr. J. L. Hromadka, dean of the Comenius Faculty, who dealt with "Ecumenical Problems To-day", Mr. A. Ziak, lay president of the Lutheran Church on "Genuine Coexistence" and Bishop I. Varga on "The Struggle Against Thermonuclear Weapons as a Task of Christians and the Church."

The statement issued by the conference says, "We rejoice in the fact that many nations have already attained political and economic freedom." It goes on to approve scientific discoveries that have made the life of men "richer and fuller" and expresses gratitude for "all the good so far done in the sphere of peaceful coexistence in the United Nations and other organisations."

The delegates go on to say that they "are seized by great anxiety and grief over the fact that weapons of mass destruction threaten humanity with unimaginable ruin. The discovery of thermonuclear weapons," they affirm, "has created a totally new situation in which any justification of war has lost its foundations."

Special tasks of the Church are listed as:

* "A realistic view" of our mission in the world which is going through profound social, economic and technical changes;

* An understanding of our responsibility for the development of the world, for the decline of faith and morality in what is called the Christian world, and a study of the reasons;

* A penitent confession that churches have not always felt sufficiently the social hardships of the working man's life;

* A humble confession that division, mistrust and lack of love among churches are sins which are under the judgement of the Lord; responsibility for seeing that the Church does not become a refuge for people who might want to misuse Christianity for their own egotistic aims;

* An understanding that the creation of social orders in the world and under present historical conditions can and must be carried out without war;

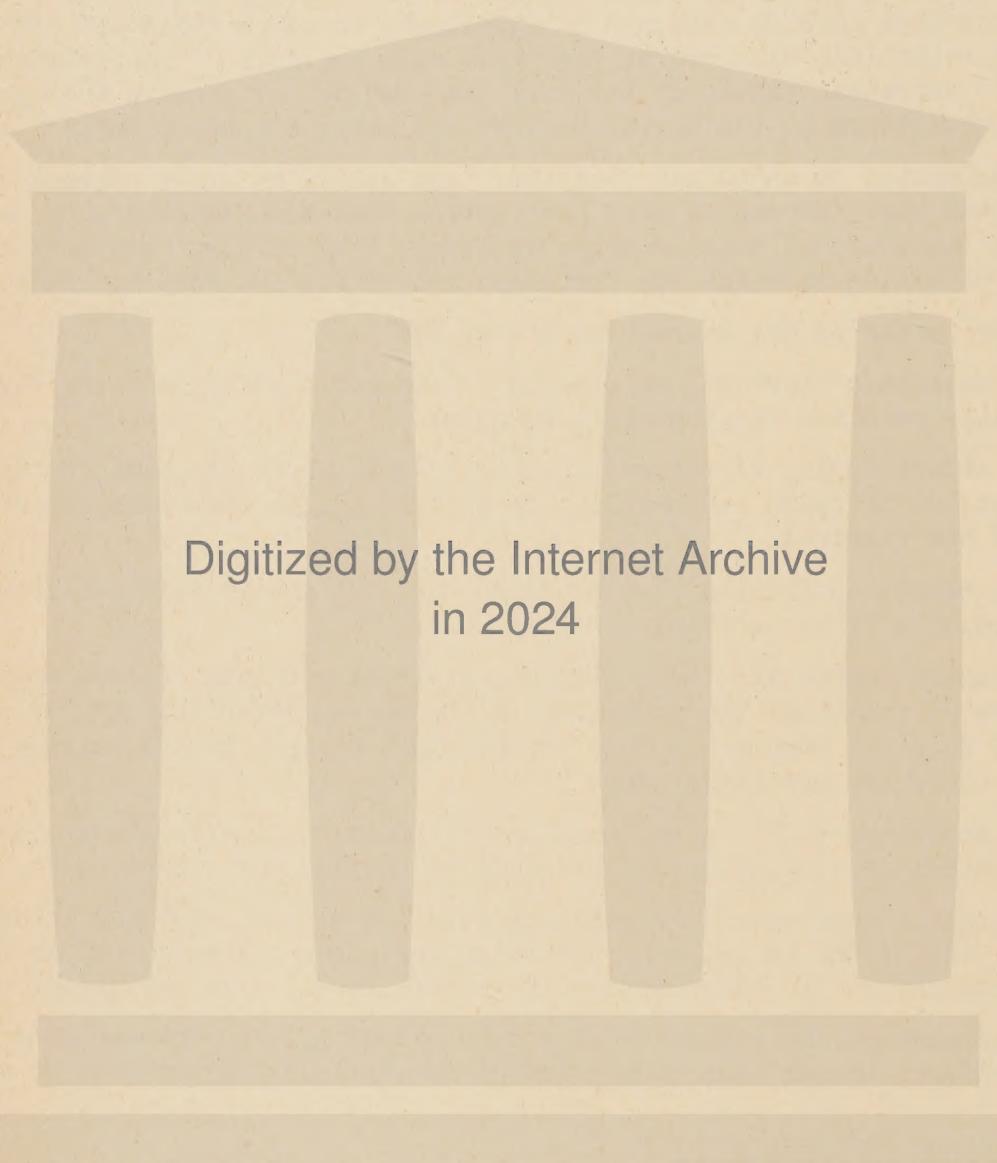
* Energetic endeavours for peaceful solution of controversial international questions, assistance in bringing understanding among nations, both in the ecumenical movement and in co-operation in peaceful endeavours throughout the world;

* Condemnation and rejection of atomic weapons....and the exertion of the greatest efforts to see that atomic energy is utilised for the good of mankind.

World Christian Congress Urged

The Czechoslovak conference proposed "a world Christian Congress where responsible representatives of Christianity might decisively condemn war in the interests of present and future generations, might condemn all armaments, all weapons of mass destruction of any kind, and pronounce seriously on the need for peace in to-day's disturbed world."

The Czech Ecumenical Council was asked to call a meeting in 1958 of "some outstanding representatives of Christian churches without regard to confession or nationality" to draw up plans for holding the world congress.



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As immediate next steps the conference advocated increased efforts for a ban on atomic weapons and their testing and a drive to bring about "genuine coexistence." They resolved to follow up the appeal of Dr. Albert Schweitzer for an end to atomic tests by appealing to the parishes in Czechoslovakia. Prayers for peace will be offered during January in all churches. Theological professors are to draw up a statement on the bases of a Christian standpoint on peace, war and weapons of mass destruction.

The Ecumenical Council in Czechoslovakia has been asked to follow up the concerns of the meeting with the World Council of Churches and the world denominational alliances "in order that they might act on public opinion" and "do everything possible to increase confidence among nations and do away with the cold war and its consequences."

E.P.S., Geneva

Civil Marriage Still Difficult for Spanish Protestant Converts

(Madrid) - A number of Protestant attempts made recently in Spain to gain permission for civil marriages where one of the parties is an ex-Catholic have been unsuccessful.

Following the governmental decree in October 1956, such couples have been able to apply for civil marriage. The 1956 decree declared invalid a ministerial decree passed in 1941 which had made the marriages virtually impossible.

A "supplementary note" issued by the registrar's department in April 1957, but not published as an official document by the government, declared that "legal obstacles" prevent the marriages because conversion to Protestantism is not considered sufficient proof of the "non-Catholicism" of people seeking civil marriage.

The ruling of the department means that the issue as a whole has not been settled. Cases must be heard separately and favourable findings referred to the registrar's office for final approval.

A group of Spanish jurists has informally stated its opinion that the new administrative measures nullify the 1956 ministerial decree and are contrary to Spanish law.

Final judgments by local courts towards the end of 1957 have in some cases reversed the earlier opinion of the magistrates in the same courts that the marriage could be contracted.

E.P.S., Geneva

Austrian Parliament Hears Protestant Case

(Vienna) - A Protestant deputy of the Austrian People's Party, Dr. H. Geissler, has addressed the Austrian parliament on equal rights for Protestants under a proposed new law regulating church-state relationships.

Dr. Geissler said the state must give Protestants the same rights as Catholics receive under any concordat with the Vatican. Negotiations are now proceeding to try to establish a revised concordat between Austria and the Vatican.

Claims made by the Protestant deputy included the rights of Protestants to cooperate freely with their sister-churches abroad, to appoint their own officials and to share in appointments at state university theological faculties. He asked for adequate subsidies from state funds for Protestant schools, collection of church taxes by the state and allocations to the churches on a per capita basis according to population.

The speaker outlined the general principle that the Protestant Church should not be bound by the state nor completely isolated from the state.

The debate was the fullest to be held on the Protestant question in the Austrian parliament since 1848.

There are about 400,000 Protestants in Austria and over 6,000,000 Roman Catholics.
E.P.S., Geneva

Austrian Socialists Reassure the Churches

(Vienna) - In a draft for a new party programme discussed at its last conference the Austrian Socialist Party clarified its attitude to the churches.

Declaring that socialism does not aim to be a "substitute religion" the party says socialism aims at a better, more just economic and social order than capitalism. Its concern is with this world.

The document claims that since socialism works for a society of free persons with equal rights it can only cooperate with adherents of religions that act in accordance with principles of freedom and equality. Socialism took up a position of "complete tolerance" toward such groups, as long as the tolerance was reciprocated.

Previous conflicts between the Austrian churches and socialism are said to have been partly due to claims made by the Church in politics and partly to socialist ideas being influenced by secular liberalism.

Protestant circles in Austria say that the draft is "an expression of the socialists' desire to build good relationships with the churches," but say parts of the statement are vague. They say the proof of the socialists' desire must be resolution of the outstanding issues still unsettled about church-state relations.

E.P.S., Geneva

More Replacements in Hungarian Lutheran Church

(Budapest) - More changes have been announced in the administration of the Lutheran Church in Hungary following government intervention to replace its elected officials. The earlier changes, announced in December, brought sharp protests from officers of the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva and New York (See EPS No. 48).

According to a January 5 issue of the Lutheran paper "Evangelikus Elet", the church's council was asked by re-instated general inspector Ernö Mihalyfi to remove the "illegalities and omissions so far discovered in the church and the lawless condition existing since the counter-revolution."

Speaking on behalf of the state's board of education, Mr. Mihalyfi said a state commissioner had been appointed after the breaking off of negotiations between church and state. He would have to examine "which of the measures taken during the past year can be legalised." The church's previous administration under the primacy of Bishop Lajos Ordass, according to Mr. Mihalyfi, must be regarded as "temporary."

The "Evangelikus Elet" report does not say whether Bishop Ordass was present at the Council's meeting.

After Mr. Mihalyfi's speech the council revoked its earlier decision of October 1956 and stated that Dr. Lajos Veto "should be regarded as senior bishop because Bishop Ordass took over the functions of a bishop after him and the Presidial Council of the People's Republic has not yet approved of his episcopal functions."

The senior bishop of the Hungarian Lutheran Church is always primate. The council's resolution therefore means that Bishop Veto has taken over this position from Bishop Ordass.

In other action the council of the Southern Diocese, where Bishop Ordass holds office, is requested by the church to inform the Presidial Council of the state of all changes of personnel since October 1, 1956, "in order to request legal approval of them."

The council meeting said it had made a "juridical mistake" in declaring the office of General Inspector of the church vacant and restored Mr. Mihalyfi to the post. Bishop Veto and Mr. Mihalyfi, as joint chairmen of the meeting, had previously told council members that the post had never been legally vacant. Mr. Mihalyfi, in accepting, said he did so "unselfishly thinking only of the interests of state and church, and in order to serve the people."

The Rev. Imre Veoreos, who had been elected general secretary of the church in June 1957, is reported to have resigned on December 6, 1957, and to have been replaced for the time being by Karoly Grunvalsky, who held the post until autumn 1956.

The council's executive was instructed to "put an end to legal uncertainty" by preparing a resolution within sixty days setting out principles for judging the validity of resolutions and decrees the council has issued since October 1956.

Mr. Mihalyfi concluded by saying that the council's actions would "bring the ideological confusion to an end" and help "to obtain unanimity with the Hungarian state, the state of our people."

E.P.S., Geneva

French Pastor Arrested for Sheltering Algerian Nationalist

(Belfort) - A stir has been caused in French Protestant circles by the arrest, in December, of Lutheran Pastor Etienne Mathiot of Belfort.

He was charged with having sheltered an Algerian leader of the "National Liberation Front" (FLN) who was sought by the police, and of helping him to escape to Switzerland.

The Algerian, Si Ali, was wanted by the public prosecutor in Algiers.

In a declaration made after his arrest, Pastor Mathiot, who has been well-known in recent years in his own district of Eastern France as a leader of groups favouring the conclusion of peace in Indo-China, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, said he helped Si Ali because he knew he was a politician, not an assassin. He declared he wished to save him from possible torture.

The Executive Committee of the French Lutheran Church, in a statement on the arrest, said:

"The problem raised by the arrest of Pastor Mathiot has deeply disturbed the members of our church. It has made us even more painfully aware of the suffering of our divided world, and of the prolongation of a struggle of which we anxiously await the end."

"The action of our brother has been judged, favourable or unfavourably, in haste and in passion. In our view, we must take care not to interpret in a purely political way the action of a Christian who wanted to be obedient to Christ's love."

"In this spirit of the love of Christ, we are unanimous in declaring once again, that the Church is opposed to all forms of violence, whatever their source."

"Unfortunately we have to admit that differences of opinion exist among us, because we all allow our personal inclinations to influence our pure obedience to Christ."

"In spite of the differences of political opinion among us, we urge the members of the Church to preserve fraternal fellowship with one another, through complete submission to the Word of God and greater faithfulness in prayer."

E.P.S., Geneva

George MacLeod Caustic about His Moderator's Dress

(Edinburgh) - In a personal report written for "Life and Work," publication of the Church of Scotland, the Church's Moderator, Dr George MacLeod, includes reflections on curious receptions accorded to him by people outside the churches when he has appeared in the traditional lace collar and cuffs of his office.

"A high proportion of industrial Scotland has long ago decided the Church is a 'period piece'," he writes, "a harmless, even graceful, antique in the midst of streamlined furniture. Large solemn books are being written about 'communication': their burden is that we are out of touch with modern man. Is it very wise, in such a setting, to direct the representative of the Church to move about like a ghost from the eighteenth century, with heavy laces at his cuffs--originally symbols of the class that need not use their lilywhite hands?" E.P.S., Geneva

Taizé Community Makes Christian Unity Recording

The Protestant men's community of Taizé, France, has issued a recording "intended as an ecumenical gesture to stimulate prayer by Christians of all traditions."

One side contains an "office for unity" sung and spoken by the group in their small church in Burgundy. The other is a dialogue on prayer for unity between Prior Roger Schutz of Taizé and Monseigneur Chevrot of the Roman Catholic Church of St. Francis Xavier in Paris.

The small long-playing 45-r.p.m. disc is available direct from Frère Robert Giscard, Communauté de Taizé, Saône et Loire, France, for 950 French francs.

E.P.S., Geneva

In brief

Canon Najib A. Cubain, the first Arab to be made a bishop in the Anglican communion, has been consecrated in Jerusalem as first bishop of a new see in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The Archbishop in Jerusalem (the Most Rev. A. C. MacInnes), was assisted in the ceremony by the Bishop in Persia and two bishops from the Sudan.

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Six new bishops have been consecrated in the Orthodox Church in Greece, bringing the Church's episcopate to its full quota of 66 members.

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An ecumenical reference library is to be established at Soest, in the West German Republic, on the initiative of Professor Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze of Dortmund. The basis of the collection will be documents dating from the early years of the ecumenical movement which were stored in the state library at Uppsala, Sweden, during the national socialist period in Germany. They are being returned by the Swedish authorities.

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A book exhibition held recently in Porto Alegre, Brazil, featured stands erected by the Lutherans, Presbyterians and Spiritualists. Bibles and Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" were in demand. A Protestant bookstore has now been opened on a central site in the town.

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The first volume of "A History of the Ecumenical Movement," first published in English in 1954, has appeared in a German translation published by Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht in Göttingen.

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Martin Niemöller, addressing a service of intercession in Frankfurt "for peace and for the churches under oppression", said it was more important for Christians to pray for their enemies than for those who suffer injustice. He said there was a temptation to requite suffering with bitterness and that Christians should pray for those suffering oppression to remain steadfast.

* *

Bishop Albert Bereczsky has replied to a letter sent by the moderatorial board of the Reformed Alliance in Germany. In his reply to the letter, which had urged pastors and elders of the Reformed Church in Hungary to elect officers who would resist political interference in the church's work, the Bishop objects to the German message as "unwarranted interference in the constitution of the Hungarian Church."

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The synod of the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland has passed a resolution in favour of cooperation with Christian churches in all parts of the world and unity between the European churches. Intercommunion, already effected between some churches in northwest Germany, is receiving special attention.

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Dr. Joachim Beckmann has been elected president of the Church of the Rhineland in succession to the late Heinrich Held, who died last autumn. The new president has been a professor at the theological seminary in Wuppertal, Westphalia, since 1951.

* *

The first issue of "Frontier", a new Christian quarterly, was published in London on January 15. Designed to take the place of two discontinued predecessors, "Christian News-Letter" and "World Dominion", the paper is edited by John Lawrence, former editor of "The Christian News-Letter." The chairman of the board of management is Sir Kenneth Grubb, who edited "World Dominion." "Frontier" aims to report current problems "in such a way as to challenge Christians to action."

* *

A book of important speeches made in the last three years by Martin Niemöller has been published by the German fortnightly "Stimme der Gemeinde" in Darmstadt, Germany. The book aims to give a connected picture of "what Martin Niemöller has really said."

* *

Under the title "The Church in the DDR", the well-known former student pastor of Halle, Johannes Hamel, has published in German a critical appraisal of the role of the Church in East German communist society. The book is published by the Käthe Vogt Verlag, Berlin.

* *

The well-known Indian ecumenical leader, Bishop C. K. Jacob, died in Kerala during December at the age of 71 after a prolonged illness. Bishop Jacob, an ex-Anglican, was a bishop of the Church of South India. His funeral in his former cathedral, at Kottayam, Travancore, was attended by 25,000 people.

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The British Council of Churches has sponsored a series of booklets on "technics and purpose." A working group, under the chairmanship of Sir John Wolfenden, has produced four titles: "Science and Existence" by Alan Richardson, "Scientific and Technological Education" by Edwin Barker, "Technical Education" by H. A. Warren, and "Purpose in Teacher Training" by Monica Wingate. The series is published by the Student Christian Movement Press.

* *

Miss Helen Roberts, until mid-1956 general secretary of the World YWCA, who played an important part in aiding Hungarian refugees in Britain in 1956 and 1957, was awarded the Order of the British Empire, in recognition of her work, in the Queen's list of new year honours. Miss Roberts is joint chairman of the World Council of Churches' Department on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society.

E.P.S., Geneva

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